

Castlemaine Naturalist

March 2008
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At the Metcalfe Cascades

PRESIDENT'S REPORT FOR 2007

I must open this report by acknowledging a debt of gratitude to Geraldine Harris. I did not accept the position of president until the second half of 2007. In the first half of the year I was unable, due to illness, to attend most general meetings, committee meetings and excursions. I have therefore relied on the "Castlemaine Naturalist" for most of the material for this report. After my recovery and having presided over just two meetings I went overseas. Thank you Geraldine for being such a comprehensive note-taker.

We had a list of excellent speakers throughout the year. Some were tandem teams – Anne and Hans van Gemert (October) and Robin Garnett and Phil Collier (November). Anne and Hans spoke on their trip to Currawinya National Park and Lake Eyre, which they illustrated with superb photos. Robin and Phil told us of their retirement venture in Tasmania. They have purchased a 19 hectare private conservation reserve near Devonport. They have both restrictions and obligations to that property. We wish them well in their venture and look forward to hearing of their progress in the future.

Following our 2007 AGM Geraldine Harris entertained and enlightened us about her camel trek in Central Australia. It seems Geraldine did the trekking and the camel hauled the gear. Another member who took on the role of speaker was Tony Morton at the June meeting. Although Tony claims to be a beginner on the subject of moths (his area of expertise being butterflies) he sounded anything but a beginner. I have always thought we had an abundance of talent among our members and that we could draw on those talented people more frequently as speakers.

Other engaging speakers on highly important subjects relevant to our planet's future were Terry White (July) on Global Warming and Bronwen Machin from the Mount Alexander Sustainability Group (March). Terry dealt with causes and macro ramifications of global warming, Bronwen dealt with what we can do at the local level. (MASG is engaging with the four main businesses in town to achieve reduced CO₂ emissions). This complements a Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance initiative aimed at reducing household emissions.

Two beautiful displays of photography were shown at the April (David Hollands) and May (Alison Pouliot) meeting; David's was on 60 years of bird photography. He told of his early (as a child) experiences of obtaining a camera and his first tentative photography efforts. Alison had been commissioned to provide photographic images for the book "Gariwerd: Reflecting on the Grampians". Several of the images she showed us were close-ups of micro subjects (a leaf, a pebble) showing the intricate visual designs of nature. One week after her photography was completed bush fires swept through the Grampians, destroying many of Alison's photographic subjects.

As far as possible it has been CFNC convention to link up excursions with the subject of the speaker of the previous night. In some instances this was possible. For example, Paul Foreman's talk on Bush Heritage Australia (September) was followed by an "Orchid Walk" at the back of Chewton. However this year many of the sites were too far a-field to visit. Graham Watson's topic the Seagrass beds of Westernport, two talks on Central Australia, one on the Grampians and one on Tasmania were all a little far for a half-day (or even a full day) excursion. In other instances the subjects were of a more general nature. Nevertheless we had many enjoyable excursions led by various members: Richard Piesse (Mt Macedon, Wewak Track); Geraldine Harris (Mopoke Reef Water Wheel, Orchid Walk); Rita Mills (North Harcourt Reservoir, Smith's Reef Track); Chris Morris (Tipperary Springs); Joy Weatherill (Conglomerate Gully); Bruce Donaldson and Marilyn Hewish (Long Forest Bacchus Marsh).

In July we sacrificed an excursion to hold the Club Workshop. We recognized that in spite of holding our membership numbers (around 80) we are an ageing club, which was at risk of decline if not demise. In recent years the club has had difficulty in attracting young (not new) members. As the existing membership has aged it has become more difficult to attract people to the committee and especially as office bearers. Under the guidance of Maurie Croke 36 members went through a process of "brainstorming" to compile a list of over 80 areas of concern. Individual concerns were then grouped and eventually refined into seven categories. For each category a convenor was appointed. Some concerns could be addressed readily; others were of a long-term or continuing nature.

Among other "special events" was a camp-out at the Grampians hosted by Geoff and Geraldine Harris at their property "Kiah". Because of family obligations I was unable to attend. Judging by the report by Denis Hurley in the newsletter and comments from other members I realize I missed a very special weekend. The wild flower walks continue to be popular under the leadership of various members of our club.

Our Christmas outing took us to Vaughan Springs where we caught up with Tony and Jenny Morton who took us on a tour of their beautiful garden. Their block, which is quite steep has been extensively terraced. The dawn breakfast held on 12th January to Barkers Creek Reservoir was attended by only five members.

The winner of the 2007 \$100 book prize sponsored by CFNC to a senior

secondary student for outstanding environmental work was Alice McNabb, a year 12 student from Newstead.

Again this year we took part in the annual Bird Count under the leadership of Chris Morris. Debbie Worland keeps us informed on the state of the swift parrots by regular up-dates on sightings (or lack of them) near the golf course. Ern Perkins keeps the publications current and supplied to the library and the market building.

From time to time we raise our collective voices against unnecessary destruction of bush in the interests of progress, for example the removal of trees along the roads to Maldon and Heathcote; and for roadside clearing.

Ern and Lesley Perkins have compiled a data-base of plants from survey work on 30 metre quadrats at approximately 60 sites in the local area.

Sadly this year we reported two deaths. Anne Lee (nee Parnaby) died in Melbourne in the middle of this year. Frank Blake, a long time member of our club died in December at his adopted home of Shepparton. Castlemaine is the poorer for the loss of these two well-loved people.

Last but certainly not least, my thanks to all committee members for their support (I feel as though I am still on P-plates). There were several new committee members in 2007. Alison Rowe who took on the roles of treasurer and web page editor, Debbie Worland, Noel Young and myself. Without the backing of the "old-stagers" in George Broadway (secretary), Geraldine Harris (newsletter editor), Chris Morris, Richard Piesse, Hans van Gemert and Rita Mills I believe my role would have been much more difficult. Also my thanks go to the "behind the scenes" workers Helen Morris and helpers who ensure that supper is ready on time, and Maggie Oliver who has been admirable in packing and mailing the newsletter. And our gratitude goes to Phee and George Broadway for allowing us to meet in their home.

Natalie de Maccus

The February A.G.M

At the A.G.M in February, the incumbent Officers were re-elected. The committee for 2008 is unchanged except for the welcome addition of Denis Hurley. The speaker for the night was Beth Mellick who explained the origin and purpose of the Norman Wettenhall Foundation.

Water Striders – George Broadway

On our last outing we visited the Metcalfe Cascades. Unfortunately there was not much cascade but there were a number of pools of various sizes among the rocks which contained water. Some contained water weed and some were home to some very small fish. I was attracted to some of the smaller pools which

seemed to have a resident Water Strider. These are small insects which live on the surface of the water, and to do so they have bodies furnished with unwettable hairs.

These made me ponder on the unusual properties of water which enable them to do this, and the properties of water which actually make life possible, fortunately for us. Unlike its chemically related compounds, water is obviously a liquid at room temperature instead of occurring as a gas like hydrogen sulphide, a near relative. Where would we be if water were a gas at those temperatures at which we prefer to exist?. Unlike most liquids which contract as they are cooled, water does also down to about 4°C after which it expands, so that as ice it occupies more space than it does as water. As a result ice is lighter than water and so it floats on the top forming an insulating layer which usually prevents ponds and streams from freezing completely. Imagine what would happen to aquatic life if this were not so.

Another important property of water is its ability to form a sort of surface "skin". Actually the water molecules at the surface are more attracted to each other than a foreign object. We may scatter flour or pollen on the surface of water and it will not be wetted and will remain on the surface. However if we disrupt this "skin" by adding say, a drop of detergent, we see that the water molecules are now attracted to the powder which becomes wet and sinks. Or an insect such as a Water Strider, which has hairs on its feet which are not wettable, is able to literally walk on the water surface.

Why does water do this? Why are water molecules so attracted to each other? It seems that the answer lies in the oxygen atom which is combined with two hydrogen atoms to form a molecule of water. Because the oxygen is small with a powerful positively charged nucleus, it tends to "steal" the electrons from its hydrogen partners. These hydrogen atoms, deprived of their rightful share of electrons find themselves attracted to the electrons around oxygen atoms in neighbouring water molecules. This leads to a bond being formed between them and so water molecules are more attracted to each other. Because of this, water molecules are more difficult to separate and thence form a liquid at room temperature. Because they link together in a mesh when cooled, they form an open structure as ice which occupies more space than it did as liquid. And because they attract each other so much, water molecules do not wet the feet of water striders.



Water Striders are insects belonging to the Order Hemiptera, that is, they are bugs. The ones encountered at Metcalfe belong to the superfamily Gerroidea and I believe may be *Mesovelia hungerfordi* one of the more common of the family. They all live on the surface of water, some in fact in the sea, and feed on live or dead animals.

Thirsty Birds and Smart Cats shouldn't be allowed to mix

Geraldine Harris

While staying in the Grampians for a week in early January during a particularly hot dry spell, I spent most evenings watching bird species coming in at dusk to drink at the dam. I listed 37 different species. Back home a week later I was horrified driving from Barkers Creek into Castlemaine about the same time one evening to see cats sitting on three dam banks! Obviously they had worked out that dams at dusk were good sites for bird hunting too!

The Cascades Excursion - Natalie de Maccus

On Saturday 9th February a band of approximately one dozen led by George Broadway left from the Octopus car park bound for Metcalfe Cascades. Our first stopping point was at the royal enclosure (where two oak trees used to stand planted for Prince Edward and Princess Alexandra). Sadly one of those icons has fallen. Here we met up with Bruce and Amanda Donaldson.

Our second stop was the Metcalfe Forest, which was disappointing in terms of flowering plants. Those we did see were:

<i>Pelagonium rodneyanum</i>	Magenta Stork's-bill
<i>Hypericum gramineum</i>	Small St. John's Wort
<i>Exocarpus cupressiformis</i>	Cherry Ballart
* <i>Cassinia arcuata</i>	Coffee bush
* <i>Hovea heterophylla</i>	Common Hovea
<i>Astroloma humifusum</i>	Cranberry Heath

We then proceeded to the Cascades (where Joy Weatherill was awaiting our arrival) – a truly beautiful spot to which I had not previously been.

Huge granite boulders, which looked as though they had been sculpted by human hands lined and dominated the Coliban River. Here the wildflower count improved considerably. We saw:

<i>Geranium affin. Solanderi</i>	Austral Crane's-bill
<i>Wahlenbergia sp.</i>	Bluebell
<i>Themeda triandra</i>	Kangaroo grass
<i>Tricoryne elatior</i>	Yellow rush-lily
# <i>Lythrum salicaria</i>	Purple loosestrife
<i>Correa glabra var glabra</i>	Rock Correa

Pelargonium rodneyanum

Magenta Stork's-bill

* In tight bud – they will probably not flower until next spring, but we were desperate to record some plants that showed sign of flowering.

Debate has again risen as to whether this plant is classified as native.



Photo – Noel Young

During our walk along the river-bank we saw an echidna being hassled by a local dog. We did our best to shoo the dog home.

On the homeward journey a few of our band (who shall remain nameless) managed to get lost. Cut off by the freeway works is their excuse. Well that's *their* story.

Bird report for the Cascades – Rita Mills

Only Fuscous Honeyeaters and Crimson Rosellas were recorded in the Metcalfe Bush, and like anywhere else, there were far fewer birds at the Cascades than we would once have expected to see: -

Long billed Corella, Magpie, Crimson Rosella, Striated Pardalote (heard) Red browed Finch, Superb Blue Fairy Wren, Australian Raven, Blackbird, White-browed Scrub-wren, thornbills (species uncertain), and a suspected Weebill (judging by its behaviour)

Extra Events – “After Anakie 2”

Mary Thompson has an exhibition of photographs at the Castlemaine Copy Centre showing the progress of post bushfire regeneration at Anakie.

Martin Scuffins on raptors

At the Newstead Landcare meeting (Newstead Community Centre) on March 13th at 8 pm, Martin Scuffins, specialist rehabilitator of injured birds of prey, will speak on raptors.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Observations

- ◆ Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos (20) at Chewton. Penny Garnett
- ◆ Very battered Emperor Gum Moth – first for some time, Blakeley Road. Also Monty the cat caught and played with baby Blue-tongued Lizard – three times! Rita Mills
- ◆ Bluebells *Wahlenbergia sp* and Spreading Wattle *Acacia genistifolia* in flower in southern part of National Heritage Park. Richard Piesse
- ◆ Army of White Cockatoos clearing out fruit on trees in Newcombe Street. Helen Morris
- ◆ Flock of 50 White Ibis roosting on island in Lake Joanna, Castlemaine Botanical Gardens. And at the footbridge near the Camp Reserve the sound of wrens alerted us to a Blackbird closely pursued by a fox! George Broadway
- ◆ Denis Hurley was privileged to see baby Pardalotes emerging from his nesting box with the adults making sure each one got away into the trees. Denis brought the now unused box to show us the tightly packed grass nest formations inside the box where you could easily make out the neatly formed nests of the past three seasons!
- ◆ Pair of Crested Shrike-tits at Muckleford South. Alison Rowe
- ◆ Geoff Harris brought a Red-browed Finch that had flown into a window at Barkers Creek. A Little Mastiff-bat that appeared from under the bookshelf was more fortunate and was released outside after identification.
- ◆ Geraldine Harris brought an attractive pupa case formed with the leaves of, and found hanging in, an Ovens Wattle *Acacia pravissima* in their garden at Barkers Creek.
- ◆ Red-browed Finches, Collared Sparrowhawks and a male Rufous Whistler in the garden in Doveton St, close to Kalimna Park. Virginia Bartlam
- ◆ A sighting of two Powerful Owls in the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens was reported to George Broadway.
- ◆ Rosy Hyacinth Orchids (up to 50 very healthy looking specimens) along the Malmsbury-Daylesford Road. Natalie de Maccus
- ◆ Botanical Gardens - February 6th; four Grey Teal on Lake Joanna and one Powerful Owl; and on Feb 26th, two Powerful Owls seen. Noel Young.
- ◆ A Blackbird with a single white feather. George Broadway.
- ◆ A solitary Chestnut-rumped Heathwren seen lately. Alison Rowe.
- ◆ Choughs have moved into our yard. Rita Mills
- ◆ Choughs, a Scarlet Robin, Red Browed Finches, Grey Fantail, Speckled Warbler(?) seen at the bird bath. Denis Hurley.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme

March 2008

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Broadways, 7 Wheeler Street, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

Fri Mar 14. Wildlife Rescue Service. Gary Cheers. UCA Hall, 8pm.

Sat Mar 15. Field trip: Maryborough Area. Depart from opposite the motel in Duke St at 1.30pm sharp. BYO afternoon tea.

Leader : Gary Cheers, Ph 5461 2970

Fri Apr 11. To be announced.

Sat Apr 12. To be announced.

Subscriptions for 2008

Ordinary membership: Single \$27, Family \$35

Pensioner or student: Single \$24, Family \$29

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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